(b) and (c) The year-wise breakup of the quantity of wheat and rice sold in the open market since 1993-94 is as under :

(Figures in Lakh Tonnes)

Year	Wheat	Rice
October, 93 to March, 94	28.56	0.17 (from Jan, 94 to Mar, 94
Apirl, 94 to March, 95	50.29	4.54
April, 95 to March, 96	63.38	6.36
April, 96 to March, 97	41.65 (Provisional)	2.54 (Provisional)

(d) Open sale of wheat and rice by FCI had a sobering effect on the market prices of wheat and rice. In the absence of open sales, market prices of wheat and rice would have registered a much higher rise.

(e) Sale of wheat and rice in the open market has been discontinued with effect from 1.4.1997. Therefore, the question of fixing any target for sale during 1997-98 does not arise.

[Translation]

Deforestation

* 193. SHRI NAWAL KISHORE RAI :
JUSTICE GUMAN MAL LODHA :

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state :

(a) whether due to continuous deforestation the forest cover is declining and the scheduled tribes, who depend on forests, are facing grave problems ;

(b) if so, whether any efforts have been made or are being made to afforest all the degraded and denuded land by involving the local communities who will be given the right to derive full benefit from the forest produce;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (PROF. SAIFUDDIN SOZ) : (a) Biennial assessment of the forest cover in the country over the past decade has shown that the forest cover in the country has stabilised around 19.5% of the geographical area. However, there could be overall resource degradation in some of the forest areas, which in turn would affect the tribal population, in and around these areas, adversely. Such degradation is, mainly on account of excessive biotic interference like grazing and fire and wide gap in demand and supply of fuelwood, fodder and small timber, etc., resulting in unsustainable withdrawals.

(b) and (c) As envisaged in the National Forest Policy, 1988, Central Government have issued guidelines to all states/union territories to involve local communities living close to forest lands, and also voluntary agencies, in protection and development of forest resources for their sustenance. Central Government have also started a 100% centrally sponsored scheme to specifically associate the tribal people, as also the rural poor, in regeneration of forests through usufruct sharing.

(d) Does not arise.

Abduction of Foreign Tourists from Kashmir

*194. SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA : Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the attention of the Government has been drawn to the newsitem captioned "Kashmir Mein Aphrit Videshi Paryatak Ab Jeevit Nahin" appearing in 'Navbharat Times' dated May 30, 1997;

(b) if so, whether all the four foreign toursts kidnapped by the terrorists have been killed;

(c) if not, the factual position thereof; and

(d) the steps proposed to be taken by the Government for the safe release of foreign hostages?

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA) : (a) Yes Sir.

(b) and (c) There is no confirmed information about the whereabouts of the 4 foreign nationals abducted in July 1995 who continue to remain untraced despite efforts.

(d) The Government of Jammu and Kashmir has constituted a Special Investigation Team for giving impetus to the investigation and inquiries in the case as also to try and get information regarding their whereabouts. It has also announced a scheme of rewards to persons giving specific information regarding the whereabouts of the hostages.

[English]

Import of Rock Phosphate

*195. SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN :
SHRI DHIRENDRA AGARWAL :

Will the Minister of CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the attention of the Government has been drawn to the newsitem captioned "Rock Phosphate Deal Rocks RCF, Prices Deliberated Inflated" appearing in the *Hindustan Times* dated June 15, 1997;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether any inquiry has been conducted in this regard ;